

# Talent Match Evaluation and Learning Contract: 2013-19

## Involvement of Young People: an evidence review

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# Introduction

The Big Lottery Fund is investing £108 million in Talent Match, its innovative programme designed to address the problems of high levels of worklessness amongst 18-24 year olds. It is being delivered through voluntary and community sector led partnerships in 21 Local Enterprise Partnership areas in England. It seeks to support those furthest from the labour market in their journey towards sustainable employment. 21 local partnerships have now had their grant funding approved and are starting in early 2014.

To support the delivery of this programme, the Big Lottery Fund has commissioned an Evaluation and Learning contract. This contract is being led by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University with its partners the Institute for Employment Research (IER) at the University of Warwick and Cambridge Economic Associates. This team has delivered similar contracts for central government departments and the Big Lottery Fund and works extensively with the voluntary and community sector.

This paper presents an evidence review around the involvement of young people in partnerships and secondly the involvement of young people in research. These form two parts of the theme for the evaluation research in 2014 around the involvement of young people. This document is intended to form the basis for further research with partnerships, through case study work, action learning and analysis of existing data. The outcome will be a series of lessons and examples for all partnerships and the Big Lottery Fund.

# Evidence Review 1: Involving young people in service design

## 2.1. Introduction

*“The Government will expand significantly young people’s direct influence and control on the design, commissioning and delivery of local services. This applies to all young people, but particularly those who are least likely to feel empowered to demand more of services.” (Aiming high for young people, DCFS and HMT, 2007)*

Reflecting a growing emphasis on public participation in public policy planning and service delivery, as well as growth of ‘consumer power’, there has been an interest in youth participation in designing policies and practices related to service delivery since the late 1960s (Sinclair, 2004; Carnegie UK Trust, 2008). From the 1990s onwards, there has been a clear commitment in the statutory and voluntary sectors to involving young people as active stakeholders with valid views and experiences, rather than simply as the passive beneficiaries of services and policies (Middleton, 2006; Cowan, 2009). Extensive guidance now exists on involving young people in decision-making (Gunn, 2008).

Involvement of young people in the decision-making processes related to service design and delivery can take various forms, and it is important to note that different levels and forms of participation are valid for different groups of young people and for different purposes. Honesty and clarity about the extent of, and limits to, young people’s involvement has been found in the literature to be as important, if not more so, than the level of involvement (see, for example Carnegie UK Trust, 2008). Nonetheless, since the mid-2000s there has been a growing emphasis on the involvement of service users in the service provision, variously termed co-design, co-production and co-delivery (see Nesta, 2013 and Bovaird, 2013). Where this harnesses digital technology this trend has been termed Gov 2.0.

This review focusses primarily on activities designed to promote the active participation of young people in service design and associated policy-making. It draws on both academic and policy literature concerning the involvement of young people in a range of initiatives to improve public service delivery. Literature on the involvement of young people in the design of services to NEET groups specifically is relatively sparse. Reflecting overarching policy developments, the majority of the literature focusses on two areas: the involvement of young people in designing health care (see, for example, Wright *et al*, 2006. Skinner *et al*, 2007) or educational

provision (see, for example, Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2009; Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007), for which they are the recipients and engaging young people with community building and associated policy making. This review draws, where relevant, on this literature, as well as literature specifically concerned with engagement of NEET and other traditionally 'marginalised' groups.

The remainder of this review considers four areas:

- the **rationale for involving young people** (as service users or other knowledgeable informants) in decision-making processes related to service provision and delivery
- **types** of involvement and **methods** used for involving young people
- the **barriers** to effective involvement of young people
- **examples of the outcomes** of involving young people.

## 2.2. Rationale for involving young people in decision-making processes

*"Services are too often designed by adults, rather than the young people who use them. Too often, they do not engage wider communities. So in every area, we should again be clear-headed about the role for collective involvement in shaping and contributing to services" Ed Miliband, Minister for the Third Sector, Speech to Unison and Compass, January 18 2007.*

An extensive literature exists on the rationale for involving young people in policy making and planning for service delivery. Broadly, the reasons given in the literature can be characterised into three groups: practical benefits to services and service delivery; benefits related to citizenship and social inclusion; and benefits related to the personal and social development of the young people involved, as well as of the staff involved in promoting young people's involvement. The specific types of benefits identified in the literature are considered under each of these headings.

### *Practical benefits to services and service delivery*

- central to the benefits related to improving services and service delivery is the idea that **the people who are most likely to know about what is needed and what gaps exist are the people who use those services**
- better understanding of what does and does not work, stemming from the views of those who use the services, results in **cost savings** by redirecting funding away from services that are unnecessary or not running appropriately
- consequently, young people using services receive **better and more appropriate services resulting in better outcomes**
- active engagement with young people in decision-making processes gives the decisions made a **sense of legitimacy**
- participative practice is increasingly a requirement of major commissioning, funding and assessing bodies, consequently, being able to demonstrate a commitment to participation of young people may bring **more funding** to organisations and so increase provision
- young people provide a **fresh perspective** on what is happening. They are less likely to be habitualised in certain ways of working or committed to particular methods of delivery because they are 'what has always been done'. Similarly, they are less likely to be burdened by past politics.

(Badham and Wade, 2010; Participation Works, 2009; Halsey *et al*, 2006; Save the Children, 2004; Kirby *et al*, 2003)

### ***Citizenship and social inclusion***

- there is a **legal imperative** to giving children and young people a 'voice' and involving them in service development, as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989): "*Children and young people have a right to have a say on all issues that affect them and for these views to be taken seriously.*" (UNCRC Article 12). However, this legal commitment only refers to children, defined as those under 18 years old. Furthermore, in their review of the reasons for young people's participation, Halsey *et al* (2006) found that relatively few of the organisations surveyed considered a legal imperative to be one of the main drivers for their involvement of young people
- where participation is based on, for example, co-production between young people and others, it serves to bring young, often marginalised, young people into contact, on equal terms, with other generations, promoting greater understanding between different groups in society. **Cross-generational engagement** is an important means of building social cohesion
- the skills developed by young people as a consequence of participating in decision-making related to service provision can be used to **engage in wider community issues and initiatives**.

(Badham and Wade, 2010; Brodie *et al*, 2009, Beethan *et al*, 2008, Carnegie UK Trust, 2008; Halsey *et al*, 2006; Hill, 2006; Kirby *et al*, 2003)

### ***Personal and social development***

- active participation allows young people to develop a range of **soft skills**, including: communication skills, team work, negotiating, future planning, self-control, self-confidence
- depending on the methods used, young people can also develop a range of **practical skills**, for example, in IT, media, etc
- participation also allows young people to have a greater **understanding and appreciation of how organisations work**
- these skills are useful in **enhancing employability** and **finding employment**
- working with young people and promoting their engagement can also **improve the skills of staff members** involved. Examples in the literature include: improvements in listening skills, producing material for a range of audiences, greater knowledge of young people generally, outreach work and the development of specific practical skills.

(Badham and Wade, 2010; Halsey *et al*, 2006; Margo *et al*, 2006; Kirby *et al*, 2003)

## **2.3. Types of involvement and methods for involving young people**

Evidence shows that young people can become involved in service design at both a strategic and an operational level. For example, they may take a strategic role in planning new service developments, in developing organisational policies or in evaluating existing services, or they may have a more operational focus in, for example, designing services, developing resources including videos and leaflets, or they may be involved in the delivery of the services themselves or in training others to deliver them (Big Lottery, 2010; Cutler, 2008; Kirby *et al*, 2003). There is a large

body of literature on methods used to engage young people (see, for example, Halsey *et al*, 2006; Sinclair, 2004; Larney, 2003; Thomas and O’Kane, 2000), with the appropriateness of different methods largely being seen to reflect both the purpose of engagement and the characteristics of young people involved (for example, there has been a reasonably large amount of work on using creative methods to facilitate participation of young people with learning disorders). National youth organisations, including UK Youth, the British Youth Council and the NYS have produced training, publications, and Toolkits to engage the hard-to-reach, and to aid the active participation of young people in research, on issues concerning young people, conducted for, and by, young people. Developed by the National Youth Agency (NYA), 'Hear By Right' (Badham and Wade, 2010), offers a framework of standards for participation and outlines the steps necessary for embedding participation of young people within youth organisations and across partnerships. Of further relevance to the Talent Match programme, NYA has produced a number of guidelines for the 'Hidden Talents' project, a Local Government Association project about creating new processes to re-engage young people classed as NEET and to support them to be more involved in decision making about local authority services and provision.

There have been various attempts to develop a theory of youth participation and conceptualise different types of participation. Hart (1992) developed a 'ladder of participation' based on the extent to which young people initiate or are in control of decision-making processes. The three lowest 'rungs' on Hart's ladder cover 'manipulation', 'decoration' and 'tokenistic' participation and the remaining five rungs cover degrees of participation ranging from 'assigned but informed' participation in which professional staff ('adults' in Hart's terminology) decide on the project and young people volunteer for it, to 'young person-initiated, shared decisions with adults' in which young people have the original ideas, set up the project and invite adults to share their expertise. Critiques of this approach have centred on the ways on which a ladder implies some sort of hierarchy in which certain types of involvement are 'better' than others. Consequently, when Hart's terminology has been applied in practice, it is more common for the lowest three non-participation rungs to be discarded and the remaining rungs to be presented neutrally as different types of participation that are appropriate to different situations (Treseder, 1997).

Evidence from the application of Hart's model (or modifications thereof) shows that it is often difficult to distinguish at the operational level which precise 'rung' activities fall into and that the main benefits of the model are in prompting organisations to think critically about how they involve young people and in identifying and avoiding 'non-participation' (Treseder, 1997; Bovaird, 2007). In practice, it is more beneficial to divide the types of involvement of young people in decision-making process related to service provision into three groups: processes in which young people are consulted, but professional staff make decisions; processes of co-production, in which young people and professional staff work together; and processes which are wholly or mostly led by young people with professional staff providing support.

### **Professional-led participation**

Professional-led participation involves the organisation engaged in service design taking a lead in the process and having ultimate decision-making responsibility. In general, participation processes involve consultation with young people and a small range of time-bound or context-specific activities. At one end of the spectrum of participation, young people may be consulted, for example, through the use of questionnaires, workshops or other feedback mechanisms. The organisation then uses this information as one of the sources on which they make decisions about service design and delivery. At the other end of the spectrum of organisation-led participation, young people are involved at the point at which decisions are made,



sharing their views and experiences and making suggestions about future direction, but it ultimately remains the organisation staff who hold sole decision-making power. Activities in this second group include using young people as researchers and inviting them to represent young people as 'experts' in presentations at board meetings (Kirby *et al*, 2003; Shier, 2001). These types of professional-led approaches are generally used when the aim is to give large numbers of young people the opportunity to have their views and experiences taken into account.

### **Co-production**

Co-production in decision-making, in which service users and professional staff work together, with both groups having substantial input and approximately equal power in the decision-making process, has become increasingly common (Bovaird, 2007; Lyons 2006; Kelly, Mulgan, and Muers, 2002). However, evidence of this type of work between NEETs (or other young people beyond school age) and professional staff remains relatively rare. Evidence suggests that the most common methods used for co-production in decision making are group discussions, forums and councils and conferences, in other words methods that bring together young people and service providers face-to-face to promote in-depth discussion and learning (Bovaird, 2007; Kirby *et al*, 2003).

### **Young people-led participation**

The use of young people-led participation is particularly evident in organisations with a specific youth focus (Halsey *et al*, 2006; Kirby *et al*, 2003). In most cases, youth-led participation in decision-making does not exclude professional staff, but draws upon their expertise and resources. In practice, it also often involves providing young people not with limitless possibilities, but instead providing them with a range of choices which have been determined by professional staff as being appropriate (Kirby *et al*, 2003). Methods for young people-led participation include youth forums, advisory groups and youth representation on commissioning and recruitment panels.

## **2.4. Barriers to effective involvement**

Barriers to effective involvement can occur at both the strategic and operational level.

### **Strategic barriers**

- a culture of compliance that promotes tokenistic 'tick box' or one-off involvement rather than embedding young people's participation in organisational practice
- lack of an agreed purpose for involving young people
- lack of time and money devoted to processes of involving young people. Evidence shows that involving young people effectively requires a long-term commitment to building networks and training and developing young people so they can play an active role in decision-making, but organisations often lack a dedicated budget for this and tend to underestimate the time commitment involved. Short-term projects and funding promote a 'quick-fix' culture which again encourages only tokenistic involvement of young people in decision-making
- lack of buy-in at all levels in an organisation, making young people's involvement seem a niche activity of little importance
- taking strategic decisions about service delivery can be complex, particularly when it involves legal and other formal agreements



- lack of existing relationships with young people, particularly in the case of organisations whose work is not primarily with young people
- disengagement of young people from participation in wider society can make recruitment difficult
- there is some evidence of negative attitudes about young people affecting organisations' willingness to work with them or to put them in positions of trust. This is particularly the case for the most marginalised groups of young people. In the case of NEETs, there may be an attitude that 'if they know so well how to get a job, why don't they have one?'

### **Operational barriers**

#### *Young people*

- involvement of certain types of young people who may not be representative of the target group. The Carnegie UK Trust (2008) has found that there is a bias towards involvement of more confident, privileged middle class young people in decision-making, although Birchall and Simmons (2004) suggest that in contrast to more general civic participation, public service participation tends to engage the less well-off
- burn-out of young people involved
- high turnover of young people involved
- unclear division of roles and responsibilities
- lack of adequate training for young people to understand and participate fully in decision-making processes
- board meetings and paperwork can often seem inaccessible to young people, particularly those with learning difficulties and literacy issues, due to the use of jargon.

#### *Organisation staff*

- lack of skills and adequate training in recruiting young people and engaging them in decision-making. There is evidence of a particular lack of accredited training
- unclear division of roles and responsibilities

(Compiled from: Fleming, 2013; Badham and Wade, 2010; Barber, 2009; Cowan, 2009; Participation Works, 2009; Carnegie UK Trust, 2008; Cutler, 2008; Houston, 2008; Bovaird, 2007; Halsey *et al*, 2006; Maguire and Truscott, 2006; Birchall and Simmons, 2004)

## **2.5. Examples of involving young people in service design and policy making**

A small number of innovative initiatives are being run to encourage the active participation of young people who are not in education, employment or training. One example is the RadioActive (<http://uk2.radioactive101.eu/>) venture led by the University of East London and funded by the Nominet Trust. It is a radio and social media project aimed at engaging and empowering young people (NEETS) and giving them a voice to discuss key issues affecting their lives. There is a gap in literature about assessing the benefits of such initiatives, which could have a more extensive reach to a wider audience.

The Carnegie Young People Initiative (1996-2007) has played a significant role in promoting youth participation (aged 10-25) across the UK. The Initiative has funded and supported young-people led projects and research. The final report of CYPI draws on good practice and weaknesses, as well as making recommendations for supporting the involvement of young people. These lessons include: the development of capacity and capability amongst professionals to support young people; empowering young people; enhancing quality standards; and portraying young people more positively.

A number of lessons can be learned from key documents produced by the Connexions service, which although no longer running, offers useful literature which promotes and supports the active involvement of young people in processes. 'Developing strategies for the active involvement of young people in Connexions' (Marsden, 2004) highlights the importance of embedding young people's involvement in service development into strategy. Embedding into strategy creates accountability, and usually, the commitment of resources of time, funding, and expertise to deliver successful outcomes. Another key guidance document produced by Connexions provides information on the importance of providing incentives and rewards for young people involved in shaping services. Key messages from this guide can be applied to programmes committed to actively involving young people in the planning and implementation processes. In summary, it states:

*“Partnerships should try to ensure that all activities young people engage in are enjoyable and positive experiences. This will act as an incentive for young people to become involved in the design, delivery and evaluation ... Rewards (including cash) should always be considered to ensure young people feel valued .... However, consideration should also be given to the negative impact that the over use of rewards will have on the willingness of individuals to participate in voluntary activity”. (Connexions, 2002)*

In their own words, young people involved in research and evaluation have highlighted the importance of having, 'a flexible environment to help young people feel welcome relaxed and valued' (Fleming, 2013).

## **2.6. Key research questions**

The review raises a series of questions for further research with the partnerships:

1. What form does young people's involvement take? How long will involvement last?
2. How does this involvement compare to the involvement of other population groups?
3. Are there examples of innovation in involvement?
4. What are the partnerships' perceptions of what the benefits are?
5. What are the young people's perceptions of the benefits from involvement and how do these change over time?
6. Who are the young people involved in partnerships in terms: previous experience of involvement, NEET, other barriers, socio economic and demographic profile (age, gender, ethnicity and disability)
7. What is the experience of the partnerships in terms of involving YP from these different groups?

8. What is the involvement of young people in the delivery of projects?
9. Are there issues/ themes where young people involvement is most appropriate, and similarly issues/ themes where it might not be appropriate? What are the limits of involvement?

The aim of this work is to distil a series of lessons for partnerships around how involvement in partnerships may be developed over the course of the programme.

## Evidence Review 2: Involving Young People in Research

It is recognised that the hard-to-reach young people, for example, those excluded from school, have little representation in participatory research. 'For a range of methodological and practical reasons, children who communicate well, and in English, or who are regular school attendees, are more likely to be given a voice in the research literature' (Curtis *et al*, 2004). As a result, few lessons have been learnt about the practicalities involved in engaging young people and gaining their meaningful participation. However, it is important to reflect on, where evidence exists, of the relative merits of different methods of engaging young people in research.

Writing in the context of children (aged 18 and below), Sinclair (2004) refers to 'meaningful, effective and sustainable' participation within the context of a considerable growth in participation activities, which have not necessarily been effective in bringing about change, or long-term change. Participation is described as having different dimensions; firstly, the varying levels of power-sharing between adults and young people in processes; secondly, the focus of the decision-making i.e. whether young peoples' decisions relate to policy, service planning or development or research and evaluation, where they may be involved as users, subjects, or peer researchers; thirdly, the type of activity can vary tremendously, from involvement in one-off consultation to on-going involvement on governance boards or councils; and fourthly, 'it is necessary to design forms of dialogue and engagement that start from the position of the child, whatever their age or ability' (Sinclair, 2004: 109). For participation to work well, it is important to understand the complexities of such dimensions and the interplay between them.

A number of large organisations have focused on delivering on the young people's participation agenda; these include: Connexions; the National Youth Service (NYS), which is funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to influence youth policy; and large charities such as Barnardos, Save the Children, the NSPCC, the Carnegie UK Trust, and the Big Lottery Fund. The charity, Save the Children, has compiled a pack for workers to use to train young people to undertake **research**. Whilst major children's charities have placed children's voices at the cornerstone of their work, and led the way for funding and co-producing extensive research and guides with children, about children's needs, there is less evidence of research specifically for, and with, the older 18-24 age group, which constitutes young people, although this definition can vary in age range across agencies working with young people.

Academic literature has increasingly begun to examine the role of children and young people as researchers (Fleming and Boeck, 2012, Kellett, 2011, Schafer and Yarwood, 2008). Kellet (2011) reviews the work of the Children's Research Centre (CRC), and the challenges arising from supporting and developing children and young people to become active researchers. Provision of a taught programme on

research processes, and one-to-one support is recognised as good practice, as well as the barriers: perceptions that young people lack the necessary competence and skills; time constraints; and lack of capacity among staff to learn, train and support young people to become researchers.

An alternative to using young people as researchers focuses on recruiting a small number of young people to play the role of 'critical friends' to an adult researcher specifically to comment on research tools, surveys, topic guides etc. to ensure they are 'young people friendly' (Swords, 2002: 30). Again, the need for training for young people taking on this role is emphasised as a key consideration.

Kirby, 2004 and Batsleer, 2010 argue that young people benefit in many ways through their involvement in research as researchers. Such benefits include: their development of personal and professional skills; gaining experience which can be used to enhance CVs; increased confidence and self-esteem; an opportunity to contribute to their local community or shape important services for their community; improved decision making (Sinclair, 2004) and through opportunities to learn about the issues that affect their lives. 'Young people are experts on their own lives' (James and James, 2004) and they hold rich knowledge and about their lived realities. As co-creators in knowledge creation, Fleming and Boeck (2012) claim that young people's involvement (as respondents and researchers) reinforces the findings, giving them credibility and greater significance.

Academic literature (Curtis *et al*, 2004) examines the practicalities and ethical issues related to giving young people incentives or rewards for participation and highlights that this subject requires a fair amount of deliberation; firstly, if there should be any reward at all; secondly, if a reward is offered, the type and amount of reward might be dependent on the setting in which the young people are involved i.e. school, community organisation, their ages, and length of involvement in the research. Such considerations, along with resources, should help determine whether a group or individual reward is offered.

### **3.1. Questions for the research**

The review raises a series of questions for further research with the partnerships:

1. How are young people involved in research?
2. How does this compare to our wider understanding of young people's involvement?
3. What are seen to be the benefits of involvement of young people for partners and for the young people themselves?
4. What support needs are there? Have these been met?
5. What are the outcomes from involvement?
6. How does involvement link to other areas of involvement?

The aim of this work is to distil a series of lessons for partnerships around how involvement of young people in research may be developed over the course of the programme.

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